
**FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE *EREBIA LIGEA* (LINNAEUS)
AND OTHER CONTROVERSIES.**

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THE EARLIEST PHOTOGRAPH, consisting of a permanent image of paintings on glass, was taken by Thomas Wedgwood in 1802, almost exactly one year before the redoubtable Adrian Hardy Haworth was to write, "I have recently heard that *Papilio Apollo* of Linnaeus has been found in Scotland, but I have not seen a British specimen." Haworth's image, unlike Wedgwood's, was strangely evanescent, but it was to signal the start of almost two hundred years during which a number of improbable sightings or captures of outstanding butterflies, in unlikely localities, were reported by lepidopterists, famous or otherwise. We were to read of Large Coppers in the West Country, Large Blues in Ireland and the Hebrides, Apollos in the Scottish Highlands and even an Arran Brown at Margate in Kent. These reports make fascinating reading and strongly promote the view that man's quest for the unicorn goes on and on.

"Inquisitor", writing in the *Entomological Magazine* in 1836, deplored the fact that butterflies in collections up and down the land, and purporting to be British, were often of Continental origin. There was a flourishing market in Continental specimens, with exotic but strangely plausible labels, and the equally plausible Victorian collectors nurtured a considerable number of fraudulent dealers. A group of these became infamous as the "Kentish Buccaneers" (Allan, 1943), and they successfully manipulated the market so as to undermine the confidence of serious collectors. "Inquisitor" demanded a complete revision of the British "List", and suggested that 34 species commonly found adorning British cabinets had no right to be labelled British. It is of interest to read his comments on two of these. "*Chryseis* (Purple-Edged Copper): In every collection of any importance, either in town or country; sometimes a whole series of males, females and undersides, being displayed; to be purchased abundantly of dealers at a price seldom exceeding one shilling for a specimen." And again, "*Virgauriae* (sic) (Scarce Copper): In every collection; I have seen nearly a thousand of this species, said to be British; fine recent specimens, said to be taken last year (1835), may be purchased abundantly, and at a very low price, of many dealers. I am not aware that a single syllable, even hinting at a capture of this insect in Britain, has ever been written." "Inquisitor" ended his diatribe with a list of "unquestionably" British species, but with the caution that the majority of specimens of *Pontia daplidice* (L.), *Argynnis lathonia* (L.) and *Nymphalis antiopa* (L.) in British collections were "decidedly and evidently exotic . . . and may be purchased for a mere song."

But to return to A.H. Haworth and his Apollo butterfly. Edward Newman (1870-71) also recalled this specimen when he quoted his correspondent J.C.

Dale, the squire of Glanvilles Wootton in Dorset. "The late Mr Haworth informed me that a lady, whom Mr Curtis believed to be the Marchioness of Bute, told him that she had received a specimen from some alpine place on the west coast in the north of Scotland." Dale had gone on to add – "Mr Curtis was convinced he saw a specimen of *Apollo* flying over the top of a house at the foot of Ben Lawers", while Henry Austin (1856), in a note to the *Zoologist*, begged to inform everyone that he had – "yesterday met a man who assured him that he saw *Parnassius Apollo* at Hanwell six years ago. At a time when *Apollo*'s claim to be a British insect is under discussion every scrap of information is of value." It was not until G.B. Wollaston (1856) wrote to Edward Newman concerning the actual capture and identification of an *Apollo* butterfly in Kent that some sort of peace seemed likely, but Wollaston unfortunately failed to stop there. He went on to talk of other spectacular captures and Newman was soon on the warpath. Under the imposing heading – *Capture of Parnassius Apollo at Dover; also Argynnis Lathonia, Chrysophanus dispar and Catocala Fraxini, near Chiselhurst, in Kent.* – he informs us that – "Mr Dale having obligingly given me a clew to the history of these splendid captures, I immediately wrote to Mr G.B. Wollaston, of Chiselhurst, who was acquainted with the particulars, and forthwith received the following most courteous reply:-

"Chiselhurst, 1st February, 1856

My dear Sir,

As you wish for more particulars about the capture of *Parnassius*, I have been to-day to see the person who took it, and hear from his own lips all about it. He was lying on the cliffs at Dover, in the end of August or the beginning of September, 1847 or 1848 (he cannot remember which), when the butterfly settled close to him, and not having his nets with him, captured it by putting his hat over it; he then carried it to his lodgings and shut window and door, and let it go in the room and secured it. He had not the slightest idea what it was till he saw it figured in some work afterwards. The insect has all the appearance of having been taken as he describes; and as he has no object to deceive, and is a person in whom I can place implicit confidence, I have no doubt, in my own mind, that the specimen is a British one. It will probably be in my own collection before this letter reaches you, when I shall be most happy to show it to you at any time you are this way . . ."

Lepidopterists could not but have been reassured by this letter although the identity of the captor has never been revealed. Since then, the history of *Parnassius apollo* Linnaeus in Britain has been critically reviewed by A.M. Morley and J.M. Chalmers-Hunt (1959), who unearthed at least one more genuine British *Apollo* (also from Kent) in their review, as well as reinforcing the impression that the central theme running through most of the

early reports was one of vagueness and romantic imagery. If we return to Wollaston's letter and read on, we learn that other rarities were out and about. After writing about *P. apollo* he goes on to say –

“with regard to *Argynnis lathonia*, I have perhaps, unintentionally, misinformed Mr Dale. It was captured in this neighbourhood, not by himself, but by an intimate friend and fellow entomologist, now dead. He has taken *Colias hyale*, female, on this common, *Chrysophanus dispar*, male, in this parish, – his friend the female . . .”

Large Coppers at Chislehurst? Such a claim could hardly inspire confidence, but other reports from the West Country were to follow.

There is limited but compelling evidence that the Large Copper may have flourished in the West Country some two hundred years ago. Five specimens of *Lycaena dispar*, together with a single Scarce Copper (*Lycaena virgaureae* Linn.), in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton, are accompanied by a pencilled label – “Possibly the specimens of the Large and Purple-edged Copper [wrong identification] caught by the Quekett brothers at Langport . . .” The Quekett brothers (E.J. and J.T.), of microscopy fame, were local collectors who allegedly gave their collection(s) to the museum in 1876-77. However, the curator at that time, William Bidgood (see Sutton 1993), wrote to A.E. Hudd (1906), “Early in the last century the late Professor [J.T.] Quekett and his brother (a banker at Langport), formed a museum in the ‘Hanging Chapel’ there. This was transferred to our society about 1867. The collection had been much neglected, so that when I went to take possession I found everything covered with mildew, moth playing havoc with the birds and mites with the insects. There were here also, three or four *dispar* which I was assured by the family were taken at Langport . . .”

R.G. Sutton (1993) has examined the evidence relating to the Quekett Large Coppers. He suggests that the specimens may no longer exist as their distressed condition, when William Bidgood took possession of them, may have precluded their addition to the collection. He goes on to say that the present museum specimens could be those caught by John Woodland, another local collector, who also presented his collection to the museum. The Curator's manuscript (still in existence at the Historical Library, Taunton Castle) states, “About the year 1864, Mr Woodland gave me a small collection of butterflies taken near Langport early in the century; among them were two or three *L. dispar* which he told me were taken by himself. In his early days he had taken care of them, but he got old and neglected them, so that when they came to me they were dilapidated . . .” Unfortunately these facts still do not prove beyond all doubt that the specimens were of Somerset origin, and with this in mind we should study the Bidgood list that is still in existence today. It includes *Parnassius apollo*, *Argynnis lathonia*, *Vanessa antiopa*, *Lycaena dispar*, *Lycaena virgaureae*, *Polyommatus acis*, and *Polyommatus alexis*. This list seems almost too good to be true and leads one to ask if the entomological dealers of the day had provided Woodland with Continental specimens to fill gaps in his collection.

The redoubtable J.W. Tutt (1906) voiced his opinion of the Langport Large Coppers – “. . . one would like more authentic information”, a sentiment that all would surely agree with. If the Queckett brothers and John Woodland did take *L. dispar* in Somerset, they were not alone. Other reports followed. In 1857, W.D. Crotch, a prolific writer on matters entomological, contributed a startling note to the *Entomologist's Weekly Intelligencer*. Under the title “Doings in the West”, he described a collecting trip to Weston-super-Mare in Somerset (20 miles from Langport). “*C. dispar* fell ignobly, slain by the hat of a friend, who kindly made the spoil over to me, in utter ignorance of its rarity, and I much regret that my absence from the locality prevents a search, which, if one may trust the aborigines, would have had a fair chance of success.” This discovery, at a time when the Large Copper was nearing the end of its time in the fens of East Anglia should have merited a further expedition to Somerset. However, there is no record of such a trip – merely the comment, “We gave up hopes of *C. dispar*, &., because the time for *T. betulae* (Brown Hairstreak) was drawing near, and we were in many instances pledged to our numerous correspondents of last year to send them, when possible, better specimens . . .”

W.S.M. D'Urban (1865) in reporting a meeting of the Exeter Naturalist's Club commented without further details that a specimen of *Chrysophanus dispar* was exhibited by Mr Wentworth Buller. Apparently it had been “picked up dead among sedges at Slapton Lea”. As Slapton Lea is one of the few places in Devon where the larval foodplant, *Rumex hydrolapathum* Hudson, grows, it is just possible that the Large Copper may have flourished in that area, and Slapton Lea is only 60 miles from the Somerset marshes where the Queckett brothers were collecting. If the Large Copper had limited its resources to East Anglia and the West Country all would have been well, but Joseph Merrin cast his net wider. In 1899 he found it at Monmouth. His account of this event makes splendid reading. “In that year (1855), accompanied by the staff of the *Gloucester Journal*, of which I was sub-editor for 26 years, in celebrating their annual “waze-geese,” or outing, we called upon Mr Robert Biddle, of Monmouth, a friend of one of the party. He had a large case of butterflies and moths hanging up, which he had taken, and I was much struck with four specimens of *C. dispar* occupying a central position among them. I had then only recently begun to collect. On my drawing his attention to them he said he took them some time previously on the slopes of the Doward Hill, bordering the river Wye, not far from Monmouth. He seemed to set no great value upon them. My great admiration of them appeared to interest him, and I was delighted the next day on opening a small packet brought to the *Gloucester Journal* office by the Monmouth coach (there was then no railway) to find two specimens of the *C. dispar* I had admired, which Mr Biddle said, in a short note, he was pleased to present to me. The appearance of these specimens, with their “poker” pins and slightly damaged antennae, and the circumstances under which they were given to me, leave no doubt of their British origin. . . .

Some year or two after *C. dispar* had pleasantly filled a blank in my cabinet, I made a three days' holiday tramp along the banks of the Wye from Ross to Chepstow, following its windings with the sketches of an amateur and the net of a young lepidopterist. In passing over the Doward Hill I reconnoitred the locality as far I was able, and I saw much marsh land bordering the Wye, but quite unsearchable unless shod with jack-boots. In the hopes of getting a better glimpse of the lower slopes of the hill, I rang the bell at the residential gate, but was politely told that as the family were away a stranger could not be allowed to examine the grounds, and I had to leave with regret, 'neath a broiling sun, what seemed classic ground, and sought refuge in the shady streets of old Monmouth . . .”

The past ninety years have seen further remarkable sightings and reports – many in the vernacular. P.B.M. Allan, the doyen of entomological gossips, related how S.G. Castle Russell had described to him a strange entomological event which had occurred some forty years previously. His wife, who “had been collecting with me for many years”, and a friend, W.G. Mills (a biology master whose sons collected butterflies), were motoring in Devon and coming to a place somewhat off the beaten track, saw “numbers of Large Coppers flying. We tried to knock some down, but they flew too fast for us. Flying in the sunshine they looked most beautiful.” Details of this wonderful event are described *in extenso* by Allan (1980) in *Leaves from a Moth-Hunter's Notebook*. In 1966, Allan increased the number of sightings when he quoted a friend (“whose word could be implicitly relied on”). “My wife was driving our car down a single track, a remote lane in the West Country, and I was sitting in the back with one of my sons. I had been watching the butterflies on the grass verge, feeding on the flowers, when all at once, and at closer range, I saw a butterfly which I was convinced was a Large Copper.

I shouted urgently for my wife to stop, but she replied that we were late already for lunch with friends, and drove on; and so, the occasion was lost.” He went on to reminisce, – “I have seen the Large Copper – *batavus* – flying at Wicken fen. What a brilliant insect it is! And I've caught *virgaureae* in Switzerland.” Allan was convinced that his friend had seen one of the larger Copper butterflies, but once again, there was no capture, and curiously no follow-up, to prove it.

On the 28th of July, 1938, Professor J.W. Heslop Harrison wrote to H.M. Edelsten from the Island of Rhum in the Hebrides. He ended his letter with an extraordinary postscript. “The most remarkable thing here is *Lyc. arion*. We have seen two but did not catch them” (Campbell, 1975). Later, however, in a letter to N.D. Riley (25.4.1939) he suggested that he had only meant to record “the possible occurrence of *M. arion* on Rhum . . . Attention was merely drawn to the possibility and to the observation of two people so that some future worker could verify or disprove our notions.” With this apparent climbdown, rumour and speculation should have died, but, in 1948,

Heslop Harrison contributed a chapter to *The New Naturalist: A Journal of British Natural History*; and in this he mentioned once again “the presence on Rhum of such species as the Large Blue butterfly (*Maculinea arion*) . . .” And so, the Large Blue controversy once more came to life. In a masterly analysis of the situation, J.L. Campbell (1975) was forced to the conclusion that the Professor's ardent and competitive personality had laid him open to a student's practical joke. Be that as it may, no specimens of the Large Blue butterfly have ever been taken on Rhum or, indeed any of the Scottish islands, and no one now seriously believes that it has ever been found north of the border. Unfortunately the matter did not rest there and, in 1962, a young man called at the National Museum in Dublin and after examining the collection informed the Curator that he had discovered the Large Blue butterfly at Dunboy in West Cork. He had no specimens to prove this but in 1963, H.C. Huggins and E.S.A. Baynes explored the locality carefully, finding no Large Blues but a number of the very bright coloured Irish form of the Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus* Rott.? ab. *mariscolore* (Kane)). Huggins (1973) described their search and concluded that the young man's sighting, like the Hebridean one, was “very Rhum”. Since then, no more has been heard of the Irish Large Blue and the matter appears to have been laid to rest.

The Arran Brown (*Erebia ligea* (Linnaeus))

One of the more convoluted histories concerns the Arran Brown. This butterfly has proved singularly elusive. Its curious history in Britain has been discussed at length by E.C. Pelham Clinton (1964) and, as a result, much of the mystery has been resolved. There are, however, a number of unanswered questions. The first published account of *E. ligea* occurring in Britain is that of James Sowerby (1804-06) in his *British Miscellany*. Under the title *Papilio blandina* he wrote, “This newly discovered species of *Papilio*, as a native of Britain, was caught in the Isle of Arran, one of the Western Islands of Scotland.” Unfortunately he used the wrong appellation, for *Papilio blandina* was the name used earlier by J.C. Fabricius for *Erebia aethiops* (Esper), and Sowerby's figure is certainly that of *E. ligea*. A few pages further on he figures *E. aethiops* under the title *Papilio ligea*; stating that “This is another new British insect, procured by A. MacLeay, Esq. Sec.L.S., from the same place as the one figured in tab. 3 [should be tab. 2] of this work.” It remained for E. Donovan (1807) to correct these errors. *E. ligea* was originally discovered on the moors behind Brodick Castle (possibly the lower slopes of Goatfell) on the Island of Arran by Sir Patrick Walker, a noted collector of the time who apparently possessed “an elegant and select collection of Insects, a collection at the time, the second best in the country.”

Sowerby's errors over the naming of *E. Ligea* and *E. aethiops* were compounded by the discovery of the latter, as that species had been found “*In insula Bota. Septembro.*” (In the Isle of Bute. September) by Dr John

Walker, Professor of Natural History in the University of Edinburgh, who was not related to Sir Patrick Walker. Dr Walker's diaries are in the Edinburgh University Library and these suggest that the date of his discovery was sometime between 1760 and 1769, some thirty years earlier than Sir Patrick Walker's discovery of *E. ligea*. He showed his specimens to J.C. Fabricius, who had commented that they were "different from the *Ligea*, and a species not in Linnaeus."

Since the discovery of *E. ligea*, innumerable collectors have searched for it on the Island of Arran, but no further specimens have come to hand. Indeed, Richard South (1906) suggested that "the captor must have exterminated the species, for, although the island has often been closely explored, no one has yet been able to detect the 'Arran Brown' again." Sir Patrick Walker's collection eventually came up for sale at Stevens' Auction Rooms, but the whereabouts of his specimens of *E. ligea* is unknown. In 1928, James F. Stephens figured two specimens of the Arran Brown in his *Illustrations of British Entomology*, with the comment, "The only indigenous specimens which have come to my knowledge were captured in the Isle of Arran, I believe, by Sir Patrick Walker and A. McLeay Esq. The accompanying plate was executed from a fine pair in my collection." The two specimens in question are in the British Museum (Natural History), but without clues as to their origin. E.C. Pelham-Clinton (1964) suggests that they are not necessarily British, and from the tenor of Stephens' remarks, are probably not.

If the story of *E. ligea* had ended with James Stephens in 1828, it would probably now be confined to entomological history or even entomological folklore. But since then further facts have emerged. In 1929, H. Willoughby-Ellis reporting on a meeting of the Entomological Club at Tring, listed a number of exhibits arranged by Lord Rothschild. One such was a single *E. ligea* apparently taken at Galashiels in the Borders by A.E. Gibbs. There are no further details and the specimen in question is now in the British Museum (Natural History). A.L. Goodson, curator of the Tring Museum, suggested (Pelham-Clinton, 1964) that it might have been incorrectly labelled. However, there is no definite proof of this. In January 1963, A.C. Gillespie donated a small collection of Lepidoptera made by his two uncles, A.B. and J.W. Gillespie, to the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh. The specimens were not labelled and many were in a distressed condition. However, the collection included a single female *E. ligea*, set underside uppermost. Lying loose in the collection was a single label which said quite simply "*Erebia blandina*/Taken on Bute (North End) July 1891." This finding and its possible significance have been discussed at length by Pelham-Clinton (1964). Whether or not this label had once been attached to the specimen of *E. ligea* or to *E. aethiops*, of which there were several in the collection, is not known. The writing on the label is in the hand of A.B. Gillespie and as he had never travelled abroad it is possible that this might be a genuine British specimen.

In 1977, three specimens of *E. ligea* were exhibited by T.J. Daley at the British Entomological and Natural History Society Exhibition. He had caught these in 1969 on the little-known western side of Rannoch Moor in north Argyll, and was apparently under the impression that they were *E. aethiops*. As he had never collected abroad, confusion as to their origin seems excluded.

In October 1994, the writer and Dr P.J. Edwards found three specimens of *E. ligea* in the G.H. Simpson-Hayward collection at Malvern College (Fig. 2, Plate B). One specimen was labelled "*Ligea* Isle of Mull 1860" while the other two specimens bore a single label "Taken on the Isle of Mull 1860 and 62. Wm. Edwards." The Isle of Mull is only about 60 miles from Arran, and the writer has no doubt as to the authenticity of the three specimens. When placed on the map of Scotland it is seen that, with the possible exception of the single record from Galashiels, all the reports of *E. ligea* are grouped in



Map. Reported distribution of *Erebia ligea* (excluding the Kentish records).

an area of south-western Scotland and no greater than 60 miles in width. If the Galashiels record is taken into account the territory is increased to 90 miles in width. This is still a very small area and given the nature of these new records it now seems reasonable to assume that *E. ligea* really does have a claim to British status.

Attempts to identify William Edwards have so far failed, but other butterflies in the collection that bore his name, were all caught in the Malvern or Worcester area. It seems likely that he and G.H. Simpson-Hayward both lived in Worcestershire. It is known that Simpson-Hayward represented Worcestershire at cricket, and that he was the last player to represent England who bowled underarm. The presence of *Erebia ligea* in the British List therefore rests on the cumulative evidence of ten reported captures, and from a scrutiny of all this it does seem reasonable to assume that the species has British status. One further capture was reported by W.J. Mercer in 1875; but it does no more than muddy the waters. Writing in the *Entomologist*, he claimed that, "a specimen of *Erebia ligea* was taken by me in the garden belonging to a house in Margate. I have been assured by competent authority that I am correct in the name of my specimen; so this will add another locality in which to find this rare insect." Edward Newman was quick to protest – "I should like to see the specimen, if Mr Mercer will kindly send or bring it." And that was that! Mercer would surely have fooled no-one when he reported this montane species from a popular seaside watering place, but, erring on the side of caution, Russell Bretherton (1989) suggested that, "If genuine, it might have been a wanderer from the Belgium Ardennes."

Acknowledgements

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***Dasychira mendosa* (Hübner, 1934) (Lep: Lymantriidae); notes on larval foodplants in India**

According to Nair (1986) this well-distributed Lymantrid is a pest of certain important crops in India. He cites millets (*Setaria*), cowpea (*Vigna sinensis*), *Ricinis communis*, banana (*Musa*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), apple (*Malus*), cacao and coffee.

I came across a single fully-grown larva on *Bridelia* underneath a mango tree. This plant is in the same family as *Ricinis*, Euphorbiaceae, so perhaps it was not so surprising that it was feeding on it. The insect "spun up" soon after, an imago, a female, emerging on my return to London in late June 1994. I was able to identify it by comparing it to a specimen in the BM (NH) collection from an example dating back to July 1894 from Karnataka in south-west India.

It was as well that I was able to verify the moth's identity from the imago as Nair gives two completely contradictory descriptions of the larva in his book. One, relating to its association with banana describing the larva thus, "light blueish-brown with reddish-brown spots . . .". Whilst his account of the insect on cacao says, "yellow spots and red stripes on thorax and paired lateral tufts on segments . . .". My find corresponded with neither, it resembled a very large *antiqua*, but that is only an approximate description.

I found the larva in Bombay. *Dasychira mendosa* according to Hampson (1892) ranges from India, through to Sri Lanka and Burma to Java and south-eastwards to Australia.

I would like to thank Mark Coode at Kew Gardens for his assistance in identifying the larval foodplant.

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